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Contra Costa Times

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TUESDAY, JUNE 17, 2008

CONTRA COSTA • BAY AREA

Facing opposition, Assemblyman yanks car fee bill

■ Concord Democrat's legislation unlikely to emerge from two Senate committees

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SACRAMENTO — Concord Democratic Assemblyman Mark DeSaulnier has decided to pull his legislation to increase document fees on car buyers after running into opposition as it made its way through the Senate.

After shepherding Assembly Bill 1939 through the Assembly in April — despite opposition from consumer groups — DeSaulnier saw that it was unlikely to get through two Senate committees chaired by fellow Democrats,

so he spiked it.

"I surrender," he said Monday, a day before it was scheduled to go before the Senate Transportation and Housing Committee, where chairman Sen. Alan Lowenthal, D-Long Beach, opposed it. "Lesson learned. It's very hard to get compromise up here. I tried to work out a compromise for both sides, but it didn't work. I'm a big boy. These are little disappointments. But I was a little surprised over how unbending people were."

The bill also faced opposition from fellow East Bay lawmaker, Sen. Ellen Corbett, D-San Leandro, who chairs the Senate Judiciary Committee, where the bill would have had to get approval.

Rosemary Shahan, the president of Davis-based Con-

sumers for Auto Reliability and Safety, praised Lowenthal and Corbett for "standing up to the car dealers and for consumers."

Car dealers, she said, are "really formidable, they're very active, really smart and their lobbyists are very seasoned. It's tough to stand up to them."

A spokesman for the California Motor Car Dealers Association was unavailable for comment. Even after the bill was approved by the Assembly, DeSaulnier softened it by eliminating a fee increase on buyers of new cars, and cut in half — from \$20 to \$10 — the increase on those who lease autos. The fee hike was to go from \$45 to \$55.

The bill's new provisions would also have doubled the

bond car dealers pay for a license to sell — from \$50,000 to \$100,000. It's a provision that new car dealers and consumer advocates alike support, because it makes it more difficult for less reliable car dealers to start businesses.

Still, that wasn't enough to satisfy Shahan, who said she thought she had a deal to eliminate all fee increases.

Shahan said the fee hikes would have been unfair to consumers and merely gone to line the pockets of the influential car dealers' lobby. Car dealers say the fee increase reflects the cost of handling an ever-increasing number of documents required by the state.

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